

From: [Melissa Wenzel](#)
To: [*CI-StPaul>Contact-Council](#); [CouncilHearing \(CI-StPaul\)](#)
Cc: Mark.McCabe@CO.RAMSEY.MN.US
Subject: Fwd: Pigs Eye Lake Island Building Project, facts and information
Date: Wednesday, October 5, 2022 8:32:43 AM
Attachments: [Pigs Eye Sand.xlsx](#)

Dear City of Saint Paul City Council members,

I sent many of you the below information in January 2021 when I was on the Ramsey County Parks and Rec Commission. I stand by every single statement I made then and urge you to not vote in support of a stop work order or any other delay to this project. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me if you have any questions.

Kind regards,

Melissa Wenzel
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*Sustain Saint Paul member, co-chair
City of Saint Paul Climate Justice Advisory Board member, co-chair*

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Melissa Wenzel** <melissa.a.wenzel@gmail.com>
Date: Mon, Jan 11, 2021 at 10:06 PM
Subject: Pigs Eye Lake Island Building Project, facts and information
To:

Good evening,

I am the Ramsey County Parks and Rec Commission member for this district which includes Pigs Eye Lake (Ramsey County District 6). I've been reading the latest concerns and questions from various community members about this project and wanted to answer a few questions that I've been seeing go unanswered. You can take a look at the entire [Pigs Eye Lake Master Plan Amendment](#) (December 2020 version) for all of the latest information. I'll be referring to this document at least once tonight.

I hope all of this information is helpful!

Brief overview: These developments started in 2012 between the Army Corps of Engineers and the Ramsey County Parks, and a feasibility study was conducted between 2015-2018. Funding has been secured from the Army Corps of Engineers, Ramsey County and from the [Lessard-Sam's Outdoor Heritage Council](#) during the 2019 legislative session. The project will enhance and restore backwater habitat by creating island and wetland features, and will improve aquatic and land habitat as well as maintaining the shoreline of Pigs Eye Lake.

Goals:

1. **Improve aquatic habitat** – Create depth and habitat diversity in Pigs Eye Lake.

Increase acreage of aquatic vegetation. Incorporate structural habitat features to promote fisheries.

2. **Improve habitat for migratory bird species** – Create suitable habitat for migratory birds such as dabbling ducks within Pigs Eye Lake.
3. **Maintain or enhance the quantity of shoreline habitat** – Protect existing floodplain forest and marsh habitat along the shoreline of Pigs Eye Lake from wind and wave erosion.

Public engagement and comment period: The project team completed a [feasibility study](#). The 30-day public comment period ended on April 12, 2018, and the feasibility study integrated Environmental Assessment Worksheet Record of Decision was finalized in accordance with the Minnesota Environmental Protection Agency and the National Environmental Policy Act. All comments received from the public comment period were included within the finalized Feasibility Study EAW Record of Decision.

Select Questions and Answers from the [Ramsey County's website](#)

- **What public outreach has been done as a part of the project?**

The project feasibility report was made available for public review and was open for comment from March 2018 through April 2018. Public coordination was conducted by the Army Corps of Engineers in accordance with National Environmental Policy Act requirements and Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. Ramsey County published and requested comment concurrently as part of Minnesota Environmental Policy Act requirements and the project was published in the Minnesota EQB Monitor.

- **What is dredged material?**

Dredged material is sediment removed from below the surface of a water. Dredged material removed from the Mississippi River is mostly sand. River currents continuously move sand downstream, and the sand tends to build up in certain places each year. The U.S Army Corps of Engineers removes material that builds up in the navigation channel so that barges and large boats can travel between the Twin Cities and New Orleans.

- **Is dredged material safe for wildlife?**

The Corps tests dredged material for contaminants. The dredged material for this project meets all MPCA guidelines. These guidelines have been developed specifically to protect the wildlife that use these habitats. Thousands of acres of habitat within the Mississippi River have been created using this process.

- **How is dredge material tested?**

The Corps collects sediment samples annually from the parts of the river that are dredged. Sediment samples are sent to independent chemical testing labs. The material is tested for pollutants such as metals, pesticides, PAHs, PCBs and cyanide. MPCA guidelines are followed for testing locations, amounts and test types. MPCA standards are used to evaluate material safety – the "Soil Reference Values" for upland uses and the "Sediment Quality Targets" for in-water placement. New samplings are performed and analyzed with all past dredging data to ensure the material is safe for island building. Sampling was conducted within Pigs Eye Lake for this project and combined with published sediment studies to make sure the site of

the islands and lake access were safe for construction. All results were coordinated with the MPCA and other local agencies which resulted in agreement that the project is safe.

- **How would building islands improve Pigs Eye Lake?** Building islands will provide a number of benefits: Provide habitat and shelter for migrating birds and ducks, underwater portions of the islands will provide structure and add different sediment types for fish, reptiles, amphibians and water-dwelling invertebrates, calm, shallow and stabilized areas around and inside of the sheltered islands will promote aquatic plants for more wildlife shelter and food, islands will block the wind across the lake helping shelter the shorelines from the wind-generated waves and reduce the loss of aquatic plants and shoreline.
- **How will the project affect future Pigs Eye Dump cleanup efforts?** The project would not adversely impact any future plans for cleanup of the dump site. The project was coordinated very carefully with the MPCA to make sure that was not a concern. The dump may benefit from the project's reduction of erosive wind and waves.

Here are answers to some of the questions raised in the past few days. *These are answers I researched, and vetted with project specialists and scientists for accuracy. However, I take responsibility for any inaccuracies I might have made.*

- **Does anyone within the community support this project?** Yes! This project has included broad public engagement and/or support from the Friends of the Mississippi River, the Lower Phalen Creek Project, the Great River Passage Conservancy, the Prairie Island Indian Community, the DNR, Ramsey County Parks and Recreation, and the Army Corps of Engineers-Saint Paul District among other organizations. Here's a [presentation given at the Dakota and Agency Partner Convening December 2019](#) (which includes Dakota community members, the Lower Phalen Creek Project, the Great River Passage Conservancy, the Prairie Island Indian Community, St Paul Parks and Rec and the city of Saint Paul) There's an [article written by the Friends of the Mississippi River](#) excited for these developments.
- **Isn't the plan to dump polluted/toxic waste into Pigs Eye Lake?** No. According to Jim Noren from the Army Corps of Engineers: "Attached is the recent sediment data from our dredge cuts in pool 2. I'm not sure what cuts are contributing to the material that is being proposed for Pigs Eye, but there shouldn't be any real concern since it should be all clean sand." (Results are attached) Additionally, Ramsey County Director of Planning and Development, Scott Yonke states: "All of the dredge material being utilized for island construction is from Lower Pool 2 (approximately river mile 828.2 and lower and year 2000 to present). The year is located right below the river mile number. This represents when the material was dredged. The dredge material data is located at the end of Appendix E of the [Pigs Eye Lake Master Plan Amendment](#). It should be on page 321-329 (spreadsheet data) in the master plan document. Look at the top of the spreadsheet for the river mile number.

The material that was utilized in Pigs Eye from river mile 828.2 or lower and from year 2000-present. There was only a very small percentage (very minimal) that had level 1 exceedances (yellow highlighted color). There were no level 2 exceedances in the dredge material. Level 1 exceedance – MPCA indicates there is no impact to aquatic vegetation; level 2 exceedance – MPCA indicates there is some impact to aquatic vegetation”.

- **We’ve been told that the dredged materials are “rich organic soil”. Does that mean that soils that have carbon-based pollutants like fuels, paints, varnishes, cleaning, disinfecting, cosmetic, degreasing, and hobby products will be dumped into the lake?** No. That term "rich organic soil" is alluding to nutrient-rich earthy materials, that “organic”, in this case, means soil that has a significant amount of decomposed or decomposing biological material mixed into it (like vegetative material).
- **I’ve never heard of this sort of project before. Has this (island building) been done before?** Absolutely! Without a lot of effort, I’ve found 5 separate examples of this work being done along the Mississippi River:

1. [Nationwide article](#) on habitat restoration with a focus on our part of the Mississippi River.
2. Here's an example of another [Mississippi River/MN island habitat improvement project](#)
3. Here’s an [article about island-building in Iowa](#).
4. A PhD student from the University of Missouri – St. Louis studied this exact topic of island building in the Mississippi River. She wrote and published her [dissertation on this topic](#) in 2013.
5. Here's a [national article of a 2007 island-building project](#) along the Mississippi River in Wisconsin.

There are likely many, many, many more sources and examples of island building successes within the Mississippi River, among other rivers across the nation and likely around the world.

I think that covers it. I’m not an expert on this topic, but I have done extensive fact-based research and study into the data and all of the resources shared in the past 9 years of this project’s development. I have come to the conclusion that this project will be hugely beneficial to the wildlife, natural resources, and community members who live, work, and recreate around Pigs Eye Lake!

Kind regards,

Melissa Wenzel

- Ramsey County Parks and Rec Commission Member
- Former Southeast Community Organization board member
- Sustainability and sustainable transit advocate
- East Side resident
- Public servant